



NEWS

from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE TO SUPPORT COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF DUCK HUNTING SEASON FRAMEWORKS

After reviewing extensive public comment, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has decided to withdraw its earlier proposal to grant six states in the lower Mississippi Flyway an opportunity to extend their duck hunting seasons until January 31. The Service instead will participate in a comprehensive national review of the season frameworks to be conducted by the four flyway councils and the National Flyway Council.

"The management of waterfowl has long been a federal-state partnership," said Service Director Jamie Rappaport Clark. "In that spirit of partnership, we will work closely with the states and flyway councils to review the current regulatory frameworks before we propose any changes."

Responding to a request from states located in the lower Mississippi Flyway, the Service, on May 29, announced a proposal to allow Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee the opportunity to extend their fall duck hunting seasons, until January 31, if each state agreed to offset the expected additional harvest by shortening the length of its season.

During a public comment period on the proposal, the Service received extensive comment.

The Service proposal was supported by the six southern Mississippi Flyway states, by sportsmen and others in those states, and by the Southern Regulations Committee of the Mississippi Flyway. The principal reason for this support was that late-winter hunting represents an important opportunity to improve the quality of hunting experiences in the deep south and those states believed that opportunity could be afforded without any expansion in total harvest.

States and individuals from all four flyways strongly criticized the Service proposal.

(more)

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Comments centered on three primary objections:

- a perception of inequity because the Service would not be offering most states the option of an extension;
- concern that the flyway councils had no role in developing the proposal and would not have the opportunity to meet and discuss concerns or alternatives before it was finalized;
- and concerns that the Service would not be able to predict the effects of the proposed extensions on harvest or duck populations and guarantee the season-length reduction would be sufficient to completely offset the expected increase in harvest.

The states further said that if changes to framework dates for duck hunting seasons are to be considered, it should be as part of an overall review of frameworks with full participation of the states and flyway councils. The review, they said, should examine both the fairness in allocating duck harvest within and among the flyways and the biological implications of any changes.

The Service said it is committed to working with the flyway councils, the National Flyway Council, and the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies in launching a complete and cooperative review.

The review process will begin this fall, with the goal of developing a consensus recommendation for the regulatory alternatives that will be considered for the 2000-2001 duck hunting season.

The Service will publish the decision in the July 13, 1998 *Federal Register*.

Ducks and other migratory birds generally migrate along four "flyways" -- the Atlantic, Mississippi, Central and Pacific. The Service, which has responsibility for managing migratory birds under the 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty Act, works cooperatively with the four flyway councils, made up of state representatives, to establish regulatory frameworks on season length, framework dates, and bag limits for waterfowl hunting seasons. The flyway councils make formal recommendations to the Service each summer, but the Service has the ultimate authority to set the frameworks. States choose their seasons and bag limits within the frameworks authorized by the Service.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 93-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System comprising more than 500 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands, and other special management areas. It also operates 66 national fish hatcheries and 78 ecological services field stations.

The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state wildlife agencies.



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from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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STATEMENT ON DUCK SEASON FRAMEWORKS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published the proposed regulations for the early migratory bird hunting seasons in the Federal Register on July 17. These regulations did not include the final decision on the framework dates for the regular duck season alternatives as previously announced.

Responding to a request from states located in the lower Mississippi Flyway, the Service, on May 29, announced a proposal to allow Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee the opportunity to extend their fall duck hunting seasons until January 31, if each state agreed to offset the expected additional harvest by shortening the length of its season.

Comments received were strongly opposed.

The decision on framework dates will be issued in a regulation in early August.

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